

ALCOTT'S TAVERN IN MEDON.

BY A TRAVELING NATURALIST.

Alcott's tavern in Medon is situated at the crossing of Sycamore street with a nameless one that turns square to the right, but doesn't run to any particular place. I have never found a person that knew where that right hand road ended. Travellers frequently turn down there by mistake, and about half an hour afterwards they may be seen wending their way thoughtfully back, muttering something about a "deep ravine" and "a broken bridge." Putting this and that together, my curiosity has become aroused in regard to that street, and some of these days I intend to explore it.

Alcott's is exactly opposite the post-office, only three doors from "Our House," and right convenient to the publication office of the "Medon Phoenix," so that no marvel if it be well patronized. I love to sit in his piazza of a shady evening, under the dense grove of locusts that skirt Sycamore street, and observe the travellers as they ride up. "Can I get to stay all night with you?" is invariably the first inquiry. This is an-

swered in a patronizing way by the landlord's "I reckon so—light!" (a light) in which reply lurks our national spirit of independence, so different from the bowing, cringing manners of an English hotel-keeper.

Let us sit here awhile, and look out together. Yonder approaches a group of horsemen, but not one of them will stop here: they are aiming to go on five miles further to "Carrick's stand," thus advancing themselves on their journey, and saving something in the bill: for our country taverns charge considerably less than those in town. As they pass by, Alcott looks at them savagely, and I'll be bound wishes them no good with that growling word "squabs!" Here comes another traveller, but on first sight we know that he lives in the county, and is going home to-night: witness that new hat strapped to his back, and the speed at which he rides; travellers at the end of a day's journey don't use horse-flesh in that way. Now, we have a couple more, each with overcoat and leggings, dry and dusty, the horses stepping gingerly, as if they had already stepped too often, and turning in towards the sign-post, quite of their own free will and accord. It would be cruel to disappoint them, nor do the riders intend it, for with the unfailing query, "Can we get to stay with you to-night?" down they come to terra firma.

A drink of water, a few yawns and stretches, and these seasoned fellows are as fresh as they were when they started at sunrise this morning, forty-three miles back. The conversation is a kind of give-and-take business all about the "crops," politics and health. Neither party has "any news of interest," at least they say so, and yet ere five minutes they have started a dozen topics. Colonel Falconer will certainly be elected sheriff in Tebo,—no less than three persons died last week in the village of Nixville,—the small steamer that plies the Walcott is aground,—the circus will be along within two weeks. All these things, and many others equally important, are communicated, while the wayfarers are removing their wrappers, and resigning themselves to the comforts of a lounge in the primitive way, tilted back, on the hind legs of the chair, their feet full high advanced, and a fragrant cigar in puff. Nobody can appreciate the luxury of tilting to a long-legged man after a hard day's ride has collected all the blood into his lower limbs; therefore, let Madame Trollope talk on.

Alcott's tavern has been the rendezvous of the town-wits for many a year, as his register plainly shows. All manner of facetiae, some of them by no means the most refined, are recorded in its pages. One entry, however, struck me as pathetic. "John Allen: where from, *the world*: destination, *the grave!*" On inquiry, I learned that the poor fellow was in the last stage of consumption, and was borne out feet foremost, only a week after the above record was made.

It is a striking proof of the popularity of Alcott's hotel, that the great men of the land so often visit it. "Daniel Webster and family" call at least once a week; "Henry Clay and suite" quite frequently; while Prince Albert, Lord Wellington and other distinguished individuals, pass

through Medon much oftener than a due attention to their national duties would seem to demand.

History is in an error in supposing that General Jackson has departed this life, for he took dinner at Alcott's, according to the record, not three weeks ago.

The same mistake prevails, and, in fact, a most pitiful anachronism has been palmed upon us in making out Napoleon Bonaparte to have died thirty years ago, when this veritable record declares he has called here with Marshal Ney three times in the last twelvemonth. But I leave these matters with the historian, and pass on.

To judge from the lay of the land and the map, Medon lies at least five hundred miles in a direct line from the ocean, but the advertisements, suspended so thickly on the wall, make it quite a maritime place, nearly all of them being headed "*For sail*," although the context is not so nautical, viz., "*For sail*, a likely negro lad—a tract of land—a good plow, nag," &c., &c. There is certainly some inconsistency here. By the side of these are notices of strays, among which I observe an animal unknown to naturalists, a *broune heffier two year old*; of daguerreotypists, travelling circuses, patent medicines— infinite in variety, and certain to do the promised work or no pay—administrator's cards—New Orleans commission merchants—a score of them—and a manuscript copy of the "Corporation Laws of Medon," certified to by the hand of the Mayor and Secretary.

These are prepared on the plan of sugar-coated pills, combining the *sauviter in modo* with the *fortiter in re*. Hitching a horse to a tree or fence, involves a penalty, so the traveller is kindly informed. "Sect. 7. Don't hitch your horse anywhere else only to the racks; you'll grunt when you come to pay a V for a little shade!" Sect. 13 says, "You can't play at long bullets (?) in the corporation—fine from one to twenty if you do!" Boys and sportsmen are deterred by Sect. 3. "Those who wish to fire off guns had better go squirrel-hunting, than to shoot in the corporation; and boys must quit their squibs and crackers. Fine one to five dollars!" Surely, no Medonite can prove refractory under such lenient rules.

One side of the wall is covered with "Mitchell's latest map of the United States, printed in 1835," authority of the highest importance in all mooted geographical points.

It is said that the anti-Texas party, in 1844, gained this county through the influence of this venerable map. As it made Texas a part of Mexico, it was easy for the politicians to prove that the arrangement could not be disturbed, and disturb it they would not. A big hole is worn through the map, denoting the locality of Medon.

It was one warm August afternoon, that I rode for the first time into this town, to lie by for the Sabbath.

The same stereotyped round of characters fell under my observation that congregate in all country towns in the South. There was the tanyard at the outskirts, with its bark-mill moved by the laziest of mules; and its noisy dogs fed to ferocity upon raw meat. There was the blacksmith's shop, with its wheezy bellows slowly rocked by the blacksmith's arm, as his eye scan-

ned the traveller. Three pale-looking journey-men looked up from their shop board, in the establishment of "Morrison, tailor." A parcel of chaps are congregated around the doggery, engaged in "three jumps, half-hammering" with the shop-weights as propellers. It is wonderful how far men can jump in this kind of sport, who are too lazy to feed their father's mules at home. At this low, one-story, log house, too near the road by half, a group of healthy children are playing, carefully watched by the maternal parent who runs out to stare at me as soon as she hears my horse's heels. Slipshod, ragged and ill-mannered, she is nevertheless amiable in my eyes, for the motherly look she casts upon her offspring, and I involuntarily think of four little ones of my own at home. We come to the town-rack, surrounded by groups of sun-burnt horses, that look wishfully after me, as if expecting that attention from me that is denied them by their own negligent masters. Poor creatures, many of them have stood here, drooping in this unshaded place since morning without a drop of water, while the true brutes—their masters—spent their hours in and about yonder foul place, the doggery. Say, ye preachers of natural perfection, is a man a man "for a that?" or is he the creature that such cruel actions denote him?

The rack is the true entrance to Medon, all beyond that being the outskirts; or, more elegantly, the *suburbs*.

Now we come to rows of small rooms rented for offices, on which the tin-plates glisten in the down-going sun, with the names of "Dr. Anthony," "James Johnston, attorney-at-law," "Dr. Cutler," "Dr. Smith, botanic physician," "Henry Quackenboss, notary public," and then a daguerrean office, denoted by a frame of likenesses of which the best thing that can be said is, that if they are likenesses, the originals deserve our commiseration. The next block of offices is labelled in the same manner, and so is the next. At this time of day, offices of all sorts are empty, their tenants being engaged elsewhere in the general search for recreation.

Before we come to Alcott's, permit me to turn back a quarter of a mile—merely in imagination, however; for, after riding 35 miles this hot day, I wouldn't do it in reality for anything—and describe to you the grave-yard. It is like country grave-yards elsewhere, uninclosed and fearfully dilapidated. Men who were worth fifty thousand lie here, with no mark except a pile of decaying rails upon their breasts; virgins, cherished in life, have no stone to point out their beds; cherub children are left without a visiter—for such is the habit of the country. It is no indication of hardness of heart, it is only the prevailing fashion, and he who would lead the way in introducing a better, "and would teach others so," would deserve national gratitude.

Shortly after the first bell had rung for supper, there drove up a horse and buggy, that fixed every attention. The animal, a fine bay, had been driven at a pace that covered him with sweat, which, fastening the dust that flew in clouds at every step, had clothed him as with a coat of yellow paint. The vehicle was thickly

daubed with the same. But it was the inmates that particularly engrossed my observation. I am something of a Lavater in my attachment to the science of physiognomy, and, although frequently mistaken in first judgments, upon the whole, have been rather successful. The couple that descended from the buggy aforesaid, consisted of a man of some forty years, and a lady closely veiled, who seemed to be young. In answer to a question addressed to her by the landlord, she uttered some indistinct tones which led me to think that she had been weeping; but as she hurried into the ladies' apartment, I could not be positive. The man applied himself first to the contents of a glass of whiskey brought from "Our House," and then took his seat amongst us long enough to permit me to make some silent observations. There was an uneasy gaze in his eye that quailed whenever you watched him closely, and he seemed clearly under the impulse of some undefined terror, while at the same time there was a strange look of triumph or gratified desire to me perfectly inexplicable. My science was at fault—either he was a villain or a saint. To the various questions propounded, he made indifferent replies, that soon silenced the inquirers; and when the second bell rang, joined us at the table. Here I had an opportunity of seeing the countenance of his companion, which was that of a girl not more than thirteen years of age, of rare beauty and proportions. She ate scarcely anything—toyed with a few spoonfuls of coffee, and then proposed to her friend to retire. To a remark which he whispered to her, I observed, as I sat directly opposite, that her face became crimson, and she cast at him a look of terror which astonished me. When the supper ended, I hastened to the register and observed the new-comers entered as "Dr. Snow and lady, from Whiteville."

Now, I felt confident there was some villainy afloat, for I was well acquainted at Whiteville, and knew of no such person; besides that it was plain to the most ordinary observer that this girl, a mere child, could not be his wife, and I felt an earnest desire to probe the matter to the bottom. I sought Alcott, a fleshy, clever fellow, with dull brains, and told him of my suspicions; but they failed altogether to convince him. Partaking of the selfish fears of his tribe, "he doubted the propriety of interfering with what didn't belong to him;" said "that widowers often marry young girls in this country," and "his customers wouldn't thank him for meddling," and so he hustled back to the supper-table. All this did not deter me, however. I felt a strange anxiety that grew more and more intense as night approached. It seemed to me that I was called upon to act at every risk. I enquired who was the most eminent lawyer in Medon, and went immediately to his house to consult him. He was everything that a lawyer ought to be—courteous, ready and candid. After hearing my statement with due gravity, he admitted that there was a possibility of wrong, but assured me that unless I could substantiate some personal affinity to the girl, that would do to base a claim upon, it was useless to interfere.

Night had come, and candles were brought in

by one of his daughters, a charming girl, just budding into womanhood. Observing that the lawyer's eye rested upon her with a father's fondness, I ventured the suggestion, "Suppose it were that sweet girl, and in a villain's hands?" This brought him to his feet, and he offered to accompany me back to the hotel, and see if anything could be done. We walked into the lady's parlor, and were fortunate enough to find the pair alone, he with a flushed countenance that denoted some wild thought within—she abandoned in excessive grief.

Both started at our entrance, and walked to the window. It was plain to me that some vile project was about to be executed, and so thought the lawyer; and introducing himself to the so-called Dr. Snow, he told him candidly of his suspicions, and firmly but respectfully demanded the cause of the lady's tears. But the lawyer had found a full match for once. The doctor turned to him with a sneer perfectly diabolical in its scorn, and ordered him to go about his business, for his intrusion was perfectly unnecessary. "This lady can answer for herself," he continued. "Maria, tell the gentleman, dear, whether you need his services. If you do, here is his fee; for the good man must have that, or he will do nothing;" and the fellow actually pulled out a gold piece, and tendered it to the lawyer with an air of impertinence that was inimitable. The latter kept his gaze upon the girl, however, and, as she hesitated for an instant to speak, said—

"Consider, young lady, what you do! If you need a protector, this may be your last chance. You shall not be injured. Speak—can we aid you?"

Her bosom heaved tumultuously, tears flowed rapidly, and, from the expression of her countenance, I felt certain she would accept his offer; when, glancing timidly up, she caught her companion's eye, glittering like a basilisk's upon her, and faintly replying—

"No, oh, no," fell fainting upon the floor.

An hour afterwards, as I sat thoughtful in my bed-room, the door being open for the comfort of ventilation, the pair passed on the way to their chamber, which was the very next to mine, and I heard his voice, in a low, threatening tone—

"If you dare to do it!"

This confirmed my purpose, and, rushing out, I loudly declared that they should not occupy the same room, that night, if I died to prevent it. A scene followed of immense confusion; the boarders en masse gathered around me; the doctor, rushing to his trunk, drew forth his pistols, and fired a ball that did not miss my head, an inch; the young lady again fainted, and was borne off by the half-robed landlady and servants; officers were sent for to secure us both; and what would have been the ultimate consequences, none can say, but at that moment a carriage drove furiously to the door, and a loud voice demanded the landlord's presence below.

At the sound, my pugnacious opponent turned pale, and ceased to speak, for up to that instant he had been loudly threatening what vengeance he would take on me.

My triumph had come. The new comer was the distracted parent of the girl, and my interpo-

sition had saved her from the villain. Nothing could exceed his tenderness to his fainting daughter, or his fury when first his eye fell upon her companion. He spit in his face with a loathing that language cannot express, struck him, unarmed and unresisting as he was, for the crowd would have torn the villain limb by limb, had he raised his arm against that grey-haired father, and seemed quite deranged.

The pretended Dr. Snow was a teacher, who had boarded for several months in this gentleman's house, and had required a thousand kindnesses and attentions by abducting his only child, the flower of his aged years.

The next Circuit Court gave the doctor five years to the penitentiary.

Alcott gives me my bill every time I call on him, for my efforts on behalf of "the sweet girl." The sweet girl, a lovely creature of sixteen, smiles and blushes alternately when I visit at her father's, but never fails to say that she owes her very life to my exertions. Her father says but little about it, but this gold lever which I wear was once his, and I paid nothing for it; this horse was ditto and ditto; and if I had brass enough to accept what his gratitude measures out to me, I might quit collecting shells and flowers, and lie up in clover.

There are many green spots in the past: memory is no heartless jade to present only dark and rugged passages to view. Life has not been altogether barren and cheerless; but of all that I have to treasure up with pleasure and enjoy with delight, this scene at "Alcott's" is one of the most cherished.